

Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado

Volume 3 | Number 3

Article 1

January 2014

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Recommended Citation

Owens, Caitlin (2014) "Leisure Behaviors of Freshmen at the University of Northern Colorado," *Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado*: Vol. 3 : No. 3 , Article 1.

Available at: <http://digscholarship.unco.edu/urj/vol3/iss3/1>

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Leisure Behaviors of Freshmen at the University of Northern Colorado

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to gain insight on the leisure behaviors of freshmen students at the University of Northern Colorado and how they relate to stress, independence, and grade point average (GPA). An online and paper convenience sample of 160 freshmen completed the 31-item questionnaire composed of leisure behavior ratings, the College Student Stress Scale, and independence level indicators. Visual inspection of the correlation matrixes revealed that involvement in religious activities is most highly correlated with GPA, drugs and alcohol activity is most highly correlated with feeling stressed over attaining goals, and doing homework is most highly correlated with GPA. Overall the study revealed that freshmen college students' chosen leisure behaviors do have a relationship with the amount of stress they experience across many aspects, their academic success, and how independent they are from their parents.

Keywords: Stress, Independence, Freshmen College Students, GPA, Leisure Behaviors

Leisure Behaviors of Freshmen at the University of Northern Colorado

The transition to college is one where individuals go through a series of shifts that help to develop their own identity; this includes their leisure behaviors. Some of these transitions include leaving home (Green, Wheatley, & Aldava, 1992) which involves moving out of the parents' or guardians' home and gaining the responsibility of their own residence, and going to college. According to Erickson (1963), leisure behavior is essential to the developmental task of forming and committing to an identity during adolescence. College is a time where students who have just moved away from their parents really figure out who they are and who they want to be as a person. In most cases, it is their first experience of independence, and they are given the opportunity to explore and discover new interests and leisure patterns that could affect them for the rest of their adult lives. Some of these leisure behaviors could include working out, hobbies, clubs and organizations, sports (club or intramural), and many more.

The leisure patterns that students may grow into during their college experience could have multiple effects on their academic lives and their overall stress levels. Students must constantly juggle their commitments to their classes, work, and extracurricular activities while still making time for a social life and their chosen leisure (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Thome & Espelage, 2004). If students are unable to find to a leisure pattern in college that they are comfortable with, they could be faced with difficulty when confronted with the demands of finding a sense of belonging and overall academic success. Young adults will be defined as those in the period following high school, where students are more likely to make their own decisions than they were in high school (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2000).

Leisure Patterns

As people transition and change through their lives, their leisure patterns change with them. College is considered a time of “becoming.” Hendry, Shuchsmith, Love, and Glending (1993) said that young adolescents (high school) can be divided into three types: a group that is very devoted to after school activities (small population); a group that does not participate in activities at all (slightly more prevalent); and a group who regularly participates in organized activities, but not intensively (majority). These are the possibilities of what a student’s leisure behaviors would look like while in high school, but then when they choose to leave home and attend college, their type could change considerably. Change results in vulnerability, and that helps students open up to fresh experiences in leisure.

Experimentation with leisure in college provides an arena for role experimentation, assists in the learning of social norms, and provides a forum in which adolescents can experiment with the challenges they will face as adults (Fine, 1990; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kleiber & Rickards, 1985). It is also suggested that students who were highly involved in high school are more likely to be highly involved as young adults in college (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Hendry, 1989; Lindsay, 1984). College also provides countless opportunities of involvement and leisure. When a student leaves home and goes to college, they are released from many constraints and are introduced to a new world of facilities, professors, peers, and unique undergraduate experiences (Hoff & Ellis, 1992). Being able to participate in the university experience provides the ultimate environment for students to find new interests and expand on leisure behaviors that were already chosen (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975).

When students are first introduced to the college life, they are given the opportunity for personal growth and self-reliance through their newfound independence. For many students, entering college means working on new daily life routines including: creating new social circles,

building new relationships with family members, developing new study habits for a new academic career, while simultaneously learning about self-care (healthy behaviors, budgeting, free time, etc.) (Zirkel & Cantor, 1990).

In order to become well-adjusted adults, it is important for late adolescents to have separation from their parents and become more individualized (Hoffman, 1984). This is detrimental for an individual to form a self-identity that is independent from their primary caregivers (Orrego & Rodriguez, 2001). “College adjustment” is a concept consisting of psychological well-being, social adaptation, academic achievement, and students’ overall outlook toward the college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Each of these factors is affected by students’ independent leisure choices. For example, leisure plays a role in academic achievement because it serves as stress reliever.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain insight on the leisure behaviors of freshmen students at the University of Northern Colorado and how they relate to stress, independence, and grade point average (GPA).

R1: What are the top leisure behaviors that freshmen participate in?

R2: What is the relationship between a student’s leisure behaviors and his/her GPA?

R3: How does freshmen students’ stress levels relate to their leisure behaviors?

R4: How does freshmen students’ levels of independence relate to their GPA?

Methods

Participants

An online and paper convenience sample was conducted by creating a link to the survey through *Qualtrics.com*. The survey was open online on October 28, 2013 to November 8, 2013. It was posted on *Facebook.com* and participants were encouraged to share the link for others to take. On November 5th and 7th, 2013, tables were set up at the campus dining halls where paper versions of the survey were available for freshmen to fill out on their way out of the meal. In all, 162 freshmen participated in the study. However, 2 students did not complete the survey completely and were removed from analysis. The remaining freshmen (n=160) were evaluated.

The freshmen participants ranged in age from 17-23. Of the 160 respondents, 33.1% were male, and 66.9% were female, which is approximately the same ratio UNC has reported for gender. Most of the respondents also reported living on campus (94.4%), while only 5.7% live off-campus with their parents or guardians. The three most common leisure activities reported included: Hanging out with friends (70.6%), spending time with family (35.6%), and working out or going to the gym (35%). The respondents' GPAs ranged anywhere from 2.0 to 4.0, with the mean equaling 3.35. When asked about currently holding a job, only 31.9% of all freshmen respondents stated they had one, and of those students, 41.1% only work between one and ten hours per week.

Measures

The instrument for this study was a 31-item questionnaire assessing leisure behaviors, stress frequencies, independence levels, and GPA among freshmen students at the University of

Northern Colorado. Two pre-existing instruments were used within the questionnaire. The first measured participants top leisure behavior choices: Measuring leisure interests (Ragheb & Beard, 1992). These leisure indicators were structured by a ranking question where twelve leisure options were listed, and participants were asked to rank the top three they choose to do in their free time. The second instrument was used to measure the respondents' stress frequencies: The College Student Stress Scale (Feldt, 2008). The stress indicators were structured by a series of Likert items on a five point scale. To assess independence, participants were asked about their methods of paying for school, whether or not they have jobs, and their self-care and financial independence. The self-care and financial independence indicators were as well structured by a series of Likert items on a five point scale. Last, respondents were asked to report on basic demographic information and their estimated GPA.

Procedures

In order to answer three of the four research questions, correlation matrixes were conducted across GPA and leisure behaviors, stress frequencies and leisure behaviors, and GPA and independence levels to determine potential patterns between each measure. In order to determine the most related and least related factors, the p-values were visually inspected for significance. Last, in order to evaluate the top leisure choices among the sample, the means of the responses for each leisure option was computed and then compared. The frequency of each leisure choice to be in respondents' top three was also measured.

Results

For the first research question, respondents were asked to rate their top three choices to do in their leisure time out of twelve different choices. Inspection of the rank score's means revealed that the categories of *hanging out with friends*, *spending time with family*, and *watching*

TV were the three most highly rated means. *Hanging out with friends*, *spending time with family*, and *going to the gym/working out* were the most frequently chosen to be in the respondents' top three. *Working out/gym*, *reading*, and *drugs and alcohol* were the three with the lowest ranking means, while *volunteer work*, *drugs and alcohol*, and *religious activities* were reported as being the least frequently picked to be in the top 3. See Figure 1 for the rank score means of leisure behaviors in freshmen.

For the second research question, Pearson correlation values were computed between the respondents' GPAs and leisure behaviors. It was found that being involved in *clubs and organizations* and *reading* were the most related with having a higher GPA, although the correlations were considered weak. There was a moderate, negative correlation between GPA and *religious activities*, $r = -.517$, $n = 23$, $p = .011$. See Table 1 for the factor correlations between GPA and leisure behaviors.

For the third research question, participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often) how frequently they were distressed over certain life aspects. Pearson correlations were then computed between the respondents' leisure behaviors and stress ratings. It was found that there are negative correlations between spending time with family and being stressed over their personal relationships, their academics, and being away from home. There were also moderate, positive correlations between participating in drugs and alcohol and being distressed over finances and attaining their goals, while involvement in clubs and organizations showed a negative correlation with being stressed over finances. These correlations also indicated that reading during leisure time had a negative relationship with being distressed over attaining their goals. With a significant p-value of .008, it was also indicated that there is a positive relationship ($r = .507$) between religious activities and the frequency of feeling

like you are no longer in control of your life. See Table 2 for the Pearson correlations between stress frequencies and leisure behaviors.

For the fourth research question, participants were asked to report on how they currently pay for their school. See Figure 2 for the data on students' methods of paying for school. The respondents were also asked to report their levels of self-care independence (laundry, grocery store, etc.) as well as their financial independence (spending money, car maintenance, etc.). Their responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often). The means of all responses were computed; the higher the mean, the more independent the student is. Freshmen were the most independent when it came to doing their own laundry and doing their homework. They were the least independent when it comes to paying their own phone bills, car payments, and car insurance. Pearson factor correlations were then computed between GPA and Independence Levels. It was demonstrated that students who did their own homework and provided their own spending money had a positive relationship with GPA. This is very significant with a p-value of .000 for both. See Table 3 for the GPA and Independence Level Factor Correlations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain insight on the leisure behaviors of freshmen students at the University of Northern Colorado and how they relate to stress, independence, and GPA. Significant correlations between GPA and leisure behaviors revealed that students who were involved in clubs and organizations on campus and enjoyed reading in their free time were more likely to have higher GPAs when compared to those who did not participate in those activities. It is generally accepted across the higher education field that students are much more successful when they are involved; they are more likely to develop healthy time management skills. A study

conducted by Kimberly Hawkins also found that there was a significant positive relationship between voluntary reading and GPA in college students (2012). Data showed significance in the relationship of having a lower GPA with the involvement of drugs and alcohol. Students who spend a majority of their free time partying are less likely to be devoting time to their studies or considering time management when it comes to getting assignments completed on time and studying for exams.

Analysis of the relationship between freshmen leisure behaviors and their stress levels revealed that spending time with one's family significantly helped reduce stress over their personal relationships, their academics, and being away from home. Strong family relationships are able to provide students with the support they need when they are having difficulties with romantic relationships, friendship conflicts, academic demands, and feeling homesick. It is the feeling knowing that the student always has someone he/she could call and that he is able to keep that connection to back home. When students have good relationships with their parents, they continually turn to their parents for help and support when needed (Kenny, 1986). With this, there is a positive relationship between this closeness and the student's overall social competence (Bell, Avery, Feld, & Schoenrock, 1985). It was also revealed that students who chose to spend time doing drugs and alcohol had trouble with their finances and obtaining their goals. These students could be spending their money on drugs and alcohol and not spending enough time actually working towards their goals in order to obtain them. Students that chose to occupy their time with religious activities were less frequently stressed over the feeling they were not in control of their lives. This positive correlation could be because those who were religious may have a strong belief that their chosen god or gods are the one(s) that are in control of their lives and decide what happens, thus resulting in people not stressing out over what needs to be controlled.

When means testing was conducted, it was discovered that freshmen students were still very much financially dependent upon their parents. Having just left high school, first-time

freshmen college students are in a place where they do not make enough money to provide for all of the typical expenses that a college student may have. Analysis of the relationship between GPA and independence levels did reveal that students who provided their own spending money had higher GPAs. These students were most likely very responsible people who did their homework, were more independent from their parents, and took their education seriously.

Limitations

When distributing the surveys, the word choice for the section on stress frequencies showed to be confusing for respondents. The question was stated as “How frequently are you distressed over each of the following life aspects?” As respondents were filling out this section on the paper surveys, they were thrown off by the word “distressed” and required a definition in order to answer the questions. Some of the survey results were obtained via Qualtrics.com so it is possible that those respondents might have answered these series of questions without knowing what was actually wanted. Using a more straightforward word like “stressed” would have helped with the confusion. It was also observed that students had a difficult time estimating their current GPA. It would have been helpful to the respondents to have some tips on the survey for how to estimate, such as a key to what letter grades equal in GPA. (A’s=4.0, A’s and B’s=3.5, B’s=3.0, etc.).

Recommendations

Professionals in a relevant field should look into finding a way to encourage first-year freshmen to voluntarily read more often as a leisure behavior. This will increase the likelihood of freshmen doing well academically and having lower levels of stress when it comes to obtaining their goals. Freshmen should also be highly encouraged to keep strong relationships with their families during their time at school in order to be more supported in their personal and academic

lives. Future researchers looking to replicate this study should add in the analysis of senior college students to see the change that occurs within the typical four years and to use as comparison between the two classes. The differences in leisure, independence, stress, and GPA would be revealed as well as the growth a college student goes through.

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